



U.S. COAST GUARD



Homeland Security

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APPLIED SUICIDE INTERVENTION SKILLS

Several years ago we implemented the Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training (ASIST) in an effort to reduce suicides in the Coast Guard. ASIST is a 2-day training program where participants learn skills to identify signs and symptoms of a person at risk for suicide, and how to intervene to help the person at risk stay safe and how to seek further help.

ASIST is to suicide prevention as CPR is to lifesaving. Everyone can be trained to perform CPR and, if they happen to see someone stop breathing and lose consciousness, they can immediately respond and begin CPR until professional help arrives. Similarly, the aim of ASIST is to teach everyone how to properly respond to someone displaying suicidal behavior, especially when to ask the question as to whether or not the individual is thinking about suicide.

Although the Coast Guard has historically averaged 4-5 suicides per year, one suicide is too many. When a member of our Coast Guard family takes their own life, we are all directly or indirectly affected by this loss. In our high OPTEMPO organization, we inevitably observe individuals who exhibit signs and symptoms that suggest suicide may be a consideration in their lives. Having members of Team Coast Guard trained and prepared to identify suicidal members is of the utmost importance. Most suicidal persons desperately want to live; however, they are unable to recognize alternatives to their problems. Having someone trained in ASIST can save a life. Each of us must make the commitment to become familiar with and recognize these symptoms, identify individuals who may be in trouble, and help them to seek assistance. Our collective ability to do so will help save lives.

Senior leaders, field commanders, and front line supervisors are critically important in our efforts to address this tragic issue. I encourage you to allow volunteers to attend a 2-day ASIST training workshop being conducted periodically at each Integrated Support Command (ISC) during FY05. These workshops will be taught by our Employee Assistance Program Coordinators (EAPC) along with our Coast Guard Chaplains. The goal is to eventually have at least one person per unit trained in ASIST.

I encourage anyone who feels they can contribute to this great cause of compassion and caring for your fellow Coastie to do so. Additional information on ASIST training is available through your supporting ISC Work-Life Office or by contacting CAPT Ruth Torres at (202) 267-1329.

To contact the Work-Life Staff closest to you, call 1-800-872-4957, followed by the extension listed next to the following ISC locations: Alameda (252), Boston (301) Cleveland (309), Honolulu (314), Ketchikan (317), Kodiak (563), Miami (307), New Orleans (308), Portsmouth (305), San Pedro (311), Seattle (313), St. Louis (302), Washington, DC (932).

Regards,

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